Beyond Fordlândia: documentary questions agro-business in the Amazon

Independent production debates the advance of soy in the largest tropical rainforest in the world

The year 2017 is symbolic for the Amazon Rainforest. The cut in Norwegian resources for the combat of deforestation, the dubious regulations of the National Copper Reserve and Associates (Reserva Nacional de Cobre e Associados - Renca) and the 90 year anniversary of the arrival of Henry Ford in the jungle, once again put a question mark on the future of the Amazon region.

Given the political and economic pressures faced by the Rainforest, the Beyond Fordlândia (2017, 75 min) production throws some light on the gap connecting two critical points in its recent history. The film covers the felling of 1 million hectares of forest for the cultivation of rubber trees and the transition to a successful soybean monoculture, which substituted enormous sections of forest for lucrative commodities for export.

Soy production in Brazil began in the 1970s, in Santa Catarina, and traced its way up through Brazil, crossing the cerrado, the Minas triangle and, in the early 2000s, it arrived in the Amazon Rainforest. In 2006, the destruction of forest for the planting of soy reached 70 thousand square kilometers.

In 2017, Brazil became the largest soy exporter in the world, supplying the external market with 63.5 million tones, overtaking the United States. The agro-business expanded exponentially, leaving a trail of environmental and social imbalance for both human and non-human agents of the forest.

The big question that is put forward in this process is: How much of this wealth is for the repair or development of the region where it was generated? Fiscal subsidies conceded by the Federal Government in 1996 helped consolidate agro-business as the economic engine of the country. The incentives, consolidated in the Kandir law, absented the production of grains and minerals for exportation from Tax on the Circulation of Goods and Services. It is estimated that the losses of states such as Pará reach R$ 35 billion reais. These losses place yet more doubt on the future.

The director and visionary of the film, Marcos Colón, is a researcher from the Culture, History and Environment Center of the Nelson Institute of Environmental Studies of Wisconsin-Madison University, USA. The inspiration for Beyond Fordlândia arose during Marco’s doctorate research, which deals with representation of the Amazon in Brazilian literature in the 20th Century.

“I had the opportunity to visit the Brazilian part of the Amazon, and get a close look at a region known only through literary work. When I read about the arrival of Ford in O Turista Aprendiz [The Apprentice Tourist], by Mário de Andrade, my focus was moved to that region. After visiting Fordlândia and Belterra, cities founded through Ford’s ventures, I decided that I needed to tell those stories”, confirmed the researcher.
One of the objectives of the film is to discuss the damage imposed on the forest, the hydrography and Amazonian man, these being ever more threatened by the advance of agro-business in the region. Beyond Fordlândia unites a vast set of analyses and the testimony of historians, doctors, researchers, representatives of local communities and thinkers on the Amazonian question in the face of agro-business. The production is active on the festival circuit around the world.